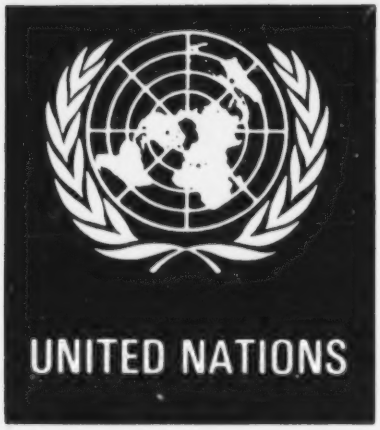

DIVISION FOR
PALESTINIAN RIGHTS

The United Nations and non-governmental organization activities on the question of Palestine

(Information note)

October 1991

91-32111

Issue 3

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Introduction

Since 1945, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have had a special relationship with the United Nations - one that has become increasingly complex and diversified. Today, almost every department of the United Nations and of its specialized agencies has liaison offices or services for NGOs. Each year resolutions and legislative mandates of United Nations bodies call for consultative, operational, programme and informational relationships with NGOs.

Over the years since the late 1960s, the United Nations General Assembly, in a series of its resolutions, has repeatedly recognized the important role of NGOs in the international efforts to promote a negotiated political solution to the Palestine problem (annex I). Expressing its appreciation to the NGOs for their work on various aspects of the question of Palestine, the General Assembly invited those organizations to maintain close cooperation with the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system in order to create conditions conducive to the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable right to self-determination, national independence and sovereignty, as well as the right to return to its homes.

The General Assembly, in its resolution 31/20 of 24 November 1976, requested the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to promote the greatest possible dissemination of information, through NGOs and other appropriate means, on its programme of implementation of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. On 2 December 1977 the General Assembly, by its resolution 32/40 B, invited all Governments and organizations to lend their cooperation to the Committee and the Special Unit on Palestinian Rights in the implementation of the programme of work outlined in that resolution. The Special Unit on Palestinian Rights was redesignated as the Division for Palestinian Rights early in 1982.

Two years later, the General Assembly, by its resolution 34/65 D of 12 December 1979, requested the Secretary-General to ensure that the Division for Palestinian Rights, in consultation with the Committee and under its guidance, undertake an expanded programme of work, inter alia, through the establishment of closer cooperation with NGOs.

In January 1985 the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People decided that a study on "the United Nations and non-governmental organization activities on the question of Palestine" be prepared by the Division for Palestinian Rights in accordance with the need recognized by the General Assembly for the dissemination of information on the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and on the efforts of the United Nations to promote the attainment of those rights. A publication entitled "The United Nations and non-governmental organization activities on the question of Palestine" was issued by the Division, under the guidance of the Committee, in 1985. This publication brings that study up to date.*

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* *The present Information Note is the third in this series. Its first issue appeared in October 1989; and second in February 1990.*

I. Participation of non-governmental organizations in the preparatory work for the International Conference on the Question of Palestine

At its thirty-sixth session, the General Assembly, in deciding to convene the International Conference on the Question of Palestine (resolution 36/120 C of 10 December 1981), invited, inter alia, all appropriate NGOs to cooperate with the Committee in the implementation of that resolution. In accordance with the provisions of the resolution, the Committee, acting as the Preparatory Committee for the Conference, at its fourth meeting, recommended the adoption of a comprehensive programme of preliminary activities to ensure the successful preparations for the Conference. The Committee further decided:

(a) To invite a varied network of NGOs responsive to the Palestinian/Israeli issue to make an active and broad contribution to the work of the Conference. Activities of NGOs would be well spaced so that there would be a continuous flow of activities throughout the months preceding and subsequent to the Conference;

(b) That the programmes proposed for NGOs would encompass organizational and educational activities, such as dissemination of newsletters, booklets and brochures, screening of films and videotapes, and mounting of photographic exhibits and posters, in addition to television and radio programmes. A series of regional symposia for NGOs throughout the world, held in conjunction with seminars in certain regions, would be designed to create a groundswell of activities and interest.

In the course of the preparatory work for the convening of the International Conference on the Question of Palestine, the role of NGOs became increasingly important. Contacts were made between the Secretariat and representatives of numerous NGOs to assure the participation of the organizations in the regional preparatory meetings. During the period March to July 1983, 73 NGOs representing Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean took part in a series of preparatory meetings held at Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, Managua, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, Kuala Lumpur and Geneva.

II. International Conference on the Question of Palestine

At its 6th and 7th meetings, on 19 and 22 October 1982, the Preparatory Committee recommended that interested NGOs subscribing to the objectives of the Conference and having a specific contribution to make to the work of the Conference, whether in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council or not, that had been approved by the Preparatory Committee, be represented by observers at the Conference. In respect of those NGOs not in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council, the Preparatory Committee suggested that the following criteria be met:

(a) The organization must be a recognized international or national organization duly established or incorporated as a non-profit organization;

(b) The organization must demonstrate that it has a positive programme in the field for which the Conference has been convened.

In the letter of invitation, the objective of the Conference was spelled out: the attainment of NGO support for effective ways and means to enable the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable rights in Palestine on the basis of United Nations resolutions.

One hundred and four NGOs were represented as observers at the International Conference on the Question of Palestine, held at Geneva, from 29 August to 7 September 1983. Over 240 persons, representing these NGOs, attended the Conference. They stood for a broad spectrum of interests, including parliamentarians, lawyers, educators, church groups, women's, youth and solidarity organizations and groups. Nine organizations from Israel, representing Jewish and Palestinian communities, also attended. Separate activities were organized by the NGOs at the Conference, among others: panel discussions, dialogues with eminent persons and consultants and the screening of films relevant to the question of Palestine. Varied NGO literature on the question of Palestine was distributed by individuals or groups of NGOs. Representatives of 22 NGOs addressed the plenary meeting of the Conference and 10 spoke in the Main Committee. The Conference resulted in an increased exchange of information among NGOs on the question of Palestine.

The Programme of Action for the Achievement of Palestinian Rights, adopted by acclamation at the International Conference on the Question of Palestine, declared that the role of NGOs remains of vital importance in heightening awareness of and support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to the establishment of an independent sovereign Palestinian State. Furthermore, the International Conference on the Question of Palestine urged and encouraged NGOs to increase awareness by the international community of the economic and social burdens borne by the Palestinian people as a result of the continued Israeli occupation and its negative effects on the economic development of the West Asian region as a whole; NGOs and professional and popular associations to intensify their efforts to support the rights of the Palestinian people in every possible way; organizations, such as those of women, teachers, workers, youths and students, to undertake exchanges and other programmes of joint action with their Palestinian counterparts; women's associations, in particular, to investigate the condition of Palestinian women and children in all occupied territory; various jurists' associations to establish special investigative commissions to determine the violations by Israel of Palestinians' legal rights and to disseminate their findings accordingly, and organizations for solidarity, particularly in Western Europe and North America, to join their counterparts in other parts of the world in giving their support, where it has not been done, to an initiative which would express the desire of the international community to see the Palestinian people at last living in their own independent homeland in peace, freedom and dignity.

The NGOs present at the International Conference on the Question of Palestine adopted a declaration (annex II) whereby they called upon the Committee to establish close links with all interested NGOs to facilitate cooperation among NGOs and between NGOs and the United Nations, and urged the Committee to convene consultative meetings with NGOs in New York and at Geneva to examine possibilities of cooperating in implementing the programme of action adopted by the International Conference on the Question of Palestine.

The NGOs attending the Conference also adopted a recommendation for action (annex III) that, inter alia, emphasized the need for the dissemination of the results of the Conference.

III. Post-Conference activities

The General Assembly, in its resolution 38/58 B of 13 December 1983, requested the Division for Palestinian Rights to expand its programme of work and, inter alia, increase contacts with NGOs and to convene NGO symposia and meetings in different regions in order to heighten awareness of the facts relating to the question of Palestine. It also invited, inter alia, all organizations to lend their cooperation to the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People in the performance of their tasks. At the same session, the General Assembly approved the establishment of two posts of liaison officers in the Secretariat to carry out the implementation of the work in connection with NGO activities.

Over the years, since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 38/58 B, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, in working with NGOs all over the world, laid special emphasis on the objective of convening the International Peace Conference on the Middle East in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions. Since December 1987, this topic has been discussed with particular urgency taking into account the intifadah, the popular uprising in the occupied Palestinian territory, and subsequent developments in the region, in particular the "Declaration of Independence" by the Palestine National Council establishing the State of Palestine, and the Palestinian peace initiative, presented by Mr. Yasser Arafat, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, to the General Assembly at one of the meetings of its forty-third session held at Geneva in December 1988.

As of October 1991, there are over 960 NGOs accredited with the Committee to participate in its NGO activities and meetings. These NGOs have elected the International, African, Asian, European, Latin American and Caribbean, and North American coordinating committees, which maintain a working relationship with the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights. In accordance with existing practice, NGOs accredited by the Committee, attend international NGO meetings and their respective regional NGO symposia as participants with the right to vote on the declarations which are adopted in such meetings, and to elect the respective regional coordinating committees, as well as the International Coordinating Committee. In addition, NGOs not yet accredited, but interested in the Committee's programme of work are invited to attend those meetings as observers.

From June 1984 to October 1991, 8 international NGO meetings and 20 regional NGO symposia have been organized by the Division for Palestinian Rights under the guidance of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People* (annex IV). International meetings and North American symposia are held each year. Since 1988, a European symposium has also been held annually, preceding the international meetings. Other regional symposia are planned on a biennial basis. These meetings, which have been attended by increasing numbers of NGOs, have provided a forum for the exchange of information and experiences and for the development of strategies and projects to be carried out by the NGOs themselves. They have also provided an important opportunity for meeting persons from the occupied Palestinian territory and for furthering contacts among NGOs.

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* *Reports of these meetings and symposia, in English and French, are available at the Division for Palestinian Rights of the United Nations Secretariat.*

Since June 1987, regional NGO symposia (with the exception of the European and North American) have been increasingly held as events, combined with regional seminars on the question of Palestine. Such events have been held twice in the Asian region (New Delhi, 1987; Kuala Lumpur, 1989), twice in the African region (Cairo, 1988; Freetown, 1990), and once in the Latin American and Caribbean region (Buenos Aires, 1990). A combined event is also planned to be held in Nicosia, Cyprus in January 1992.

Two preparatory meetings are convened annually, one to lay the groundwork for the North American regional NGO symposium and the other for the international NGO meeting. The purpose of such meetings is to serve as a forum for consultations between the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, the NGO coordinating committees and the Division for Palestinian Rights in order to work out a programme for forthcoming meetings, including format, topics for panels and workshops, identification of panelists, workshop facilitators and resource persons, and discussion of other organizational matters. Questions of coordination of activities between the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the NGO community are also discussed at the preparatory meetings.

IV. Other non-governmental organization activities

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 32/40 B of 2 December 1977, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People has been commemorated on 29 November every year since 1978 in New York, at Geneva and Vienna, as well as in other cities. Spokespersons from the international community of NGOs address these meetings. Over the years, a large number of NGOs have participated in the commemoration of the Day.

Following the request of the 98 NGOs present at the First International NGO Meeting held at Geneva, from 20 to 22 August 1984, the Division for Palestinian Rights sent out an inclusive questionnaire to all NGOs with which the Division had been in contact, to obtain fuller information on their aims and types of activities. The questionnaire is used to enable the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to make a determination concerning accreditation of new NGOs.*

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* *A copy of the questionnaire can be obtained at the Division for Palestinian Rights of the United Nations Secretariat:*

Mrs. Michèle Poliacof
Liaison Officer
United Nations Secretariat
Room S-3650
New York, N.Y. 10017
U.S.A.

At the same meeting, NGOs requested the Committee, through the Division, to expand its monthly bulletin to include a regular section on NGO activities and information. In pursuance of this request, a regular section on a variety of activities carried out by NGOs has been added to the bulletin.*

During the period following the International Conference on the Question of Palestine some qualitatively new signs in the NGO activities have become obvious. This was manifested in the closer coordination work among NGOs in different regions and their improved cooperation with the Division for Palestinian Rights of the United Nations Secretariat. The 1980s, in particular, were characterized by a growing interest and greatly increased participation by NGOs throughout the world in the United Nations activities aimed at solving the question of Palestine, as well as by their readiness to contribute to these efforts.

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* *The first issue of the bulletin to contain this feature was the one for September 1984 (volume VII, No. 9).*

Annex I

GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTIONS RELATED TO NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION ACTIVITIES ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

"Question of Palestine"

31/20 of 24 November 1976
32/40 B of 2 December 1977
34/65 D of 12 December 1979
36/120 B and C of 10 December 1981
ES-7/6 of 19 August 1982
37/86 B of 10 December 1982
38/58 B and E of 13 December 1983
39/49 A, B and C of 11 December 1984
40/96 A and B of 12 December 1985
41/43 A, B and C of 2 December 1986
42/66 A, B and C of 2 December 1987
43/175 of 15 December 1988
44/41 A and B of 6 December 1989
45/67 A and B of 6 December 1990

"Humanitarian assistance"

2252 (ES-V) of 4 July 1967

"Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East"

2341 B (XXII) of 19 December 1967
2452 C (XXIII) of 19 December 1968

"United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East"

2535 C (XXIV) of 10 December 1969
2672 B (XXV) of 8 December 1970
2792 B (XXVI) of 6 December 1971
2963 B (XXVII) of 13 December 1972
3089 A (XXVIII) of 7 December 1973
3331 C (XXIX) of 17 December 1974

3419 A (XXX) of 8 December 1975
31/15 B of 23 November 1976
32/90 B of 13 December 1977
33/112 B and C of 18 December 1978
34/52 B and C of 23 November 1979
35/13 B and C of 3 November 1980
36/146 D and H of 16 December 1981
37/120 B and D of 16 December 1982
38/83 C and D of 15 December 1983
39/99 B and D of 14 December 1984
40/165 C and D of 16 December 1985
41/69 C and D of 3 December 1986
42/69 C and D of 2 December 1987
43/57 C and D of 6 December 1988
44/47 C and D of 8 December 1989
45/73 C and D of 11 December 1990

"Assistance to the Palestinian People"

38/145 of 19 December 1983
39/224 of 18 December 1984
40/170 of 17 December 1985
41/181 of 8 December 1986
42/166 of 11 December 1987
43/178 of 20 December 1988
44/235 of 22 December 1989
45/183 of 21 December 1990

"The uprising (intifadah) of the Palestinian people"

43/21 of 3 November 1988
44/2 of 6 October 1989
45/69 of 6 December 1990

"Living conditions of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories"

39/169 of 17 December 1984
40/201 of 17 December 1985

Annex II

NGO DECLARATION AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

We, the representatives of over one hundred non-governmental organizations represented at the International Conference on the Question of Palestine, 29 August to 7 September 1983, at Geneva, wish to thank the Preparatory Committee for the Conference for having invited our participation.

We have appreciated the possibility of addressing the Conference and of the opportunity for us to meet and discuss issues related to the purposes of the Conference, and to explore means for future cooperation among us and with the United Nations.

We consider this coming together of so many non-governmental organizations on the question of Palestine unique and wish to build on this first contact. With this in mind, we call on the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People to establish close links with all interested non-governmental organizations and between non-governmental organizations and the United Nations.

We urge the Committee to call consultative meetings with non-governmental organizations at the Headquarters in New York and at the United Nations Office at Geneva to examine possibilities of cooperating in implementing the programme of action adopted by the International Conference. The consultative meeting in New York could be held when the question of Palestine will be taken up by the United Nations General Assembly.

Annex III

RECOMMENDATION FOR ACTION BY NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS ATTENDING THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

Non-governmental organizations participating in the non-governmental organizations meeting on 5 September 1983 recommended, inter alia, the following:

- Promotion of the results of the International Conference on the Question of Palestine and all other United Nations resolutions and decisions on this question;

- Maintaining of contacts with one another through exchange of addresses, information about our organizations, and exchange of publications;

- Establishment of non-governmental organization committees around the United Nations to promote the plan of action adopted by the Conference and to institute dialogues amongst the people concerned;

- Emphasis in all follow-up activities, particularly with the media, of the underlying purpose of the Conference - that is, to seek peace and justice;

- Dissemination of the results of the Conference and the speech made by Chairman Yasser Arafat;

- Informing the United Nations Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People of non-governmental organizations activities, publications and plans of action.

Deeply concerned by the deteriorating situation of Palestinian women and children, urge the United Nations and other bodies and organizations to provide assistance to Palestinian women and, in particular, urge the United Nations, in preparation for the 1985 World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, to undertake a full examination of the situation of Palestinian women and of the measures of assistance to be taken on their behalf and that the question be considered as a separate item at the 1985 Conference.

Annex IV

LIST OF REGIONAL SYMPOSIA AND INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS ON THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE HELD SINCE JUNE 1984

North American regional symposia

(First) North American Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(New York, 25-27 June 1984)

(Second) North American Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(New York, 10-12 July 1985)

(Third) North American Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(New York, 11-13 June 1986)

(Fourth) North American Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(New York, 24-26 June 1987)

(Fifth) North American Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(New York, 29 June-1 July 1988)

(Sixth) North American Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(New York, 21-23 June 1989)

(Seventh) North American Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(New York, 27-29 June 1990)

(Eighth) North American Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Montreal, 28-30 June 1991)

Asian regional symposia

(First) Asian Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(New Delhi, 1-3 May 1985)

(Second) Asian Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(New Delhi, 8-10 June 1987)
(combined with the Fourth Asian Regional Seminar on the Question of Palestine)

(Third) Asian Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Kuala Lumpur, 18-22 December 1989)
(combined with the Fifth Asian Regional Seminar on the Question of Palestine)

African regional symposia

(First) African Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Dakar, 5-7 August 1985)

(Second) African Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Cairo, 18-22 December 1988)
(combined with the Fifth African Regional Seminar on the Question of Palestine)

(Third) African Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Freetown, 2-6 April 1990)
(combined with the Sixth African Regional Seminar on the Question of Palestine)

European regional symposia

(First) European Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Vienna, 30 June-1 July 1986)

(Second) European Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Geneva, 29-30 August 1988)

(Third) European Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Vienna, 28-29 August 1989)

(Fourth) European Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Geneva, 27-28 August 1990)

(Fifth) European Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Vienna, 26-27 August 1991)

Latin American and Caribbean regional symposia

(First) Latin American and Caribbean Regional NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine
(Buenos Aires, 5-9 February 1990)
(combined with the Fourth Latin American and Caribbean Regional Seminar on the Question of Palestine)

International meetings

First International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine
(Geneva, 20-22 August 1984)

Second International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine
(Geneva, 9-12 September 1985)

Third International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine
(Vienna, 2-4 July 1986)

Fourth International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine
(Geneva, 7-9 September 1987)

Fifth International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine
(Geneva, 31 August-2 September 1988)

Sixth International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine
(Vienna, 30 August-1 September 1989)

Seventh International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine
(Geneva, 29-31 August 1990)

Eighth International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine
(Vienna, 28-30 August 1991)

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